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**POLK, EZEKIEL  
FAMILY PAPERS  
1828-1875**

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Archival Technical Services

Accession Number: 1972.242  
Date Completed: December 12, 1972  
Location: I-K-5  
Microfilm Accession Number: 1242

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## INTRODUCTION

The Ezekiel Polk Family Papers are centered on the descendants of Colonel Ezekiel Polk (1747-1824), Revolutionary War soldier and pioneer settler in Hardeman County, Tennessee. The majority of the papers are those of Ezekiel Polk's grandson, John Jackson Polk (1813-1871), planter of Hickory Valley (Hardeman County), Tennessee. The papers of John Jackson Polk's father, William Wilson Polk (1776-1848), planter of Walnut Bend (Phillips County) Arkansas, form another large section of the collection. The remaining papers concern Charles T. Howard (fl. 1828-1846) and William T. Howard (fl. 1828-1866), merchants of Middleburg (Hardeman County), Tennessee, and Wardlaw H. Howard (fl. 1839-1871), cotton factor and commission merchant of Memphis, Tennessee; the Mississippi Central Railroad Company (1858-1875), which include those of General Rufus Polk Neely (1808-1901), planter, soldier, and railroad executive; and William Palmer (fl. 1840-1870), businessman of Middleburg, Tennessee. These papers were given to the Manuscript Section by the great-great grandson of William Wilson Polk, Oscar Polk Chapleau of Hickory Valley, Tennessee, on April 11, 1972.

The materials in this collection measure 2.10 linear feet. There are no restrictions on the materials. Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the Polk Family Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Ezekiel Polk Family Papers, containing approximately seven-hundred items and two volumes and spanning the years 1828-1875, are concentrated on the decade of the 1840s. These papers consist of correspondence, accounts, estate papers, legal documents, organization papers, and receipts.

Most of the prominent figures in these papers are descendants of Colonel Ezekiel Polk (1747-1824), Revolutionary War soldier and pioneer settler in Hardeman County, Tennessee. The first part of the collection is composed of the papers of one of Ezekiel Polk's sons, William Wilson Polk (1776-1848), who joined his father and brothers-in-law, Colonel Thomas McNeal (1771-1830), and Thomas Jones Hardeman (1788-1854), in establishing the first white settlement in Hardeman County, Tennessee, in about 1822. At the time the county court was organized at the home of Thomas McNeal near Hickory Valley in 1823, William Polk served as Justice of the Peace and as Chairman of the county court. Remaining in Hardeman County until 1828, William Polk then moved across the Mississippi River and settled at Walnut Bend (Phillips County) Arkansas, where he operated one of the largest plantations in the Mississippi Valley. In 1844, William Polk financed the successful presidential campaign of his nephew, James Knox Polk.

Accounts for William Wilson Polk concern primarily the shipment by steamboat of cotton from Polk's Mississippi River plantation at Walnut Bend, Arkansas, to market in New Orleans. These records provide an insight into the cotton trade and the relationship between planter and factor with the latter represented by the firms of Fellowes, Johnson & Company; Pickett, Perkins & Company; and John Williams, all of New Orleans, and W. Howard & Company of Memphis. Other accounts concern sundries such as tar, rope, bagging, and gunny sacks purchased by Polk for the plantation through his cotton factors from general commission merchants. Cotton transported to market in New Orleans and Memphis in 1847-1848 involved shipments ranging from 50-280 bales and sold at prices between 4½ to 7½ of a cent per pound. Shipments were sent on steamboats including the "Autocrat," "Clarksville," "Eclipse," "James Dick," "James Hewitt," "Josiah Lawrence," "Missouri," "Moro Castle," "Swiss Boy," and "Uncle Sam." Steamboat shipping charges ranged from eight cents per bushel for corn to one dollar per bale for cotton.

William Polk was also a large producer of corn. According to the 1840 census, he was the largest producer of corn in the United States. Accounts for corn shipments in 1847-1848 show a range in quantity of shipments between forty-four and 750 sacks sold on the New Orleans market at prices from thirty-three to ninety cents per bushel.

Accounts for John Jackson Polk include a miscellaneous account book (1851-1857) including lists of Negroes hired out to work for various individuals. Other accounts concern receipts for cotton shipped to market in Memphis by wagon and steamboat in 1841-1870. Accounts for cotton sales, 1840-1870, include sales of cotton in New Orleans (1840-1849) and in Memphis (1851-1870), with shipments varying in size from ninety-three and one-half pounds (1869) to fifty-four bales (1851) with a fluctuation in prices

from five and one-eighth of a cent per pound at New Orleans in 1844 to a high of eighty-five cents per pound in Memphis in 1864. Steamboats used to ship cotton to New Orleans (1842-1848) included "Joan Dow," "Lady of Lyons," "Lad of the Lake," "Louisiana," and "Marshal Ney." Other accounts include those for sundries purchased from cotton factors and commission merchants in Memphis (1852-1873); shipping invoices for freight shipped by the Memphis and Charleston Railroad Company (1854-1867); and steamboat receipts (1858-1863) for items shipped to J.J. Polk from Memphis and Cincinnati on the steamboats "John H. Bills," "Resolute," and "W.H. Langley."

Accounts in the Charles T. Howard and William T. Howard papers concern the Howard mercantile business in Middleburg (Hardeman County), Tennessee, for the period 1828-1859. Included are accounts for cotton sales through the firms of Fellowes, Johnson & Company in New Orleans and W. Howard and Company in Memphis for the years 1845-1855 with prices between 6¼ and 9½ cents per pound.

Accounts in the Mississippi Central Railroad Company papers include a balance sheet dated 1866 and shipping invoices dated 1858-1861 and 1866-1874.

Accounts in the William Palmer papers include cotton sales for 1843-1844 with prices ranging from four and seven-eighths to six and one-eighth cents per pound.

Correspondence in the William Wilson Polk papers is dated 1847-1849 and is primarily incoming correspondence received by Polk at his plantation at Walnut Bend, Arkansas, from cotton factors in New Orleans including Fellowes, Johnson & Company; Pickett, Perkins & Company; and John Williams. Topics dealt with include the shipment of cotton and corn to the New Orleans market, market news, and the purchase of sundries for the Polk plantation.

Correspondence in the John Jackson Polk papers spans the years 1841-1875 and concerns primarily the sale of cotton on the Memphis and New Orleans markets. Incoming correspondence is addressed to J.J. Polk at Middleburg and Newcastle, Tennessee, prior to 1869 and after this time to Hickory Valley, Tennessee. Prominent among the correspondents are Memphis cotton factors including Day and Proudfit, J.F. Frank and Company, William Keenan Hill, Strange and Company, W. Howard and Company, McConnell and Brothers, and Milam, Bowling and Company. New Orleans cotton factors whose correspondence is included are M.D. Cooper and Company, John W. Lane, and Pritchard and Bickham.

Correspondence in the Charles T. Howard and William T. Howard papers is primarily incoming correspondence addressed to Charles T. Howard and W. Howard of Middleburg, Tennessee, for the years 1838-1846. Prominent correspondents include Wardlaw H. Howard of Memphis, brother of Charles T. Howard; J.M. Howard, another brother of Charles T. Howard, of Caddo Parish, Louisiana; John W. Timberlake, son-in-law of Charles T. Howard, of Memphis, Tennessee, and Family Mills, Virginia; and Robertson Topp of Memphis.

Correspondence for the Mississippi Central Railroad Company for 1856-1871 is from A.J. McConnico, company secretary, and Rufus Polk Neely, company president, and is addressed to J.J. Polk, a company director.

Correspondence in the William Palmer papers consists of incoming correspondence from cotton factors in Memphis and New Orleans concerning cotton shipments and sundries ordered on account for the period 1842-1844.

Estate papers included in the collection are for William Bowers, 1839-1865; Richard S. Boyd, 1855-1858; David Crockett, 1849-1858; and William Polk, 1830-1852.

Legal documents include a bond agreement for the Mississippi Central Railroad Company dated 1875, court judgments undated and 1833-1842 for C.T. Howard; notices of public protest against C.T. Howard and W. Howard (1839-1848), and promissory notes to C.T. Howard and W. Howard (undated and 1827-1858).

Organization papers include the constitution and bylaws for the New Castle Division, Sons of Temperance of the State of Tennessee dated 1848-1849.

Receipts include those for general accounts in the Charles T. Howard and William H. Howard papers, dated 1827-1847, and those in the William Palmer papers, dated 1843-1867.

Data for the early settlement of Hardeman County, Tennessee, was taken from Samuel Cole William's *The Beginnings of West Tennessee in the Land of the Chickasaws, 1541-1841* (1930).

## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

### **William Wilson Polk**

- 1776                    September 10 – Born probably in York County, South Carolina, son of Ezekiel Polk and Mary Wilson Polk; received liberal education; taught school; became a planter; lived early part of life in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina
- ca. 1803                Married Elizabeth Dodd
- ca. 1804                Moved to Maury County, Tennessee
- 1822                    With father and others, helped form first white settlement in Hardeman County, Tennessee
- 1823                    Elected as Justice of the Peace and Chairman of County Court, Hardeman County, Tennessee
- 1828                    Moved across Mississippi River into Walnut Bend (Phillips County) Arkansas, where he operated one of the largest plantations in the Mississippi Valley
- 1844                    Financed presidential campaign of nephew, James Knox Polk
- 1848                    October 8 – Died on plantation

## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

### **John Jackson Polk**

- 1813                    September 5 – Born in Maury County, Tennessee, son of William Wilson Polk and Elizabeth Dodd Polk
- ca. 1822                Moved with parents to Hardeman County, Tennessee
- 1835                    February 24 – Married Thressia Bowles in Hardeman County, Tennessee
- Operated cotton plantation near Hickory Valley (Hardeman County) Tennessee
- 1871                    Died at Hickory Valley (Hardeman County) Tennessee

## CONTAINER LIST

### **Box 1 – William Wilson Polk Papers**

1. Accounts – General – Fellowes, Johnson & Company, 1847-1848
2. Accounts – General – Pickett, Perkins & Company – John Williams, 1847-1848
3. Accounts – Steamboat Receipts – Fellowes, Johnson & Company – W. Howard, 1848
4. Accounts – Steamboat Receipts – Pickett, Perkins & Company – John Williams, 1847-1848
5. Correspondence – General – Bruce, E.E. - Williams, John, 1848-1849
6. Correspondence – Fellowes, Johnson & Company, 1848
7. Correspondence – Pickett, Perkins & Company, February 6, 1847 - February 5, 1848
8. Correspondence – Pickett, Perkins & Company, March 13 - June 23, 1848
9. Correspondence – Pickett, Perkins & Company, July 6 - September 23, 1848
10. Estate Papers – Bowers, William, 1839-1865
11. Estate Papers – Boyd, Richard S., 1855-1858
12. Estate Papers – Crockett, David, 1849-1858
13. Estate Papers – Polk, William, 1830-1852

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1. Account Book, 1851-1857
2. Accounts – Cotton Receipts, 1841-1870
3. Accounts – Cotton Sales, undated and 1840-1849
4. Accounts – Cotton Sales, 1851-1859
5. Accounts – Cotton Sales, 1860-1863
6. Accounts – Cotton Sales, 1864-1867
7. Accounts – Cotton Sales, 1868-1870
8. Accounts – General – Cotton Sales – Sundries Purchased, undated and 1852-1873
9. Accounts – Miscellaneous, 1863-1876
10. Accounts – Shipping Invoices – Memphis and Charleston Railroad Company – undated and 1854-1855
11. Accounts – Shipping Invoices – Memphis and Charleston Railroad Company – 1856-1867
12. Accounts – Steamboat Receipts – 1858-1863
13. Correspondence – Incoming – Bayliss - Harris
14. Correspondence – Incoming – Hill, Strange and Company - Lowry
15. Correspondence – Incoming – McConnell and Brothers – Thomas J. Read, Son & Company
16. Organizations – Sons of Temperance – Tennessee – New Castle Division, No. 122 – Constitution and Bylaws – 1848-1849



**Box 3 – Charles T. Howard and William T. Howard Papers**

1. Accounts – General – undated
2. Accounts – General – 1828-1837
3. Accounts – General – 1838-1840
4. Accounts – General – 1841-1842
5. Accounts – General – 1843-1859
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7. Correspondence – Author unknown - Averill
8. Correspondence – Bradner, McKenna and Wright – Harris, Thomas
9. Correspondence – Howard, Charles T. – Howard, M.V.
10. Correspondence – Howard, W., 1838
11. Correspondence – Howard, W., January – April, 1839
12. Correspondence – Howard, W., May – November, 1839

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2. Correspondence – Howard, W., 1842 - 1843
3. Correspondence – Howard, W. and Company, 1839 - 1844
4. Correspondence – Howard, W.O. – McNeal, A.T.
5. Correspondence – Oliver, George H., - Oliver, William N.
6. Correspondence – Rawlings, J.H. and Company – Scruggs, P.G.
7. Correspondence – Timberlake, John W., January 27 – September 11, 1840
8. Correspondence – Timberlake, John W., January 20 – November 1, 1841
9. Correspondence – Timberlake, John W., May 20, 1842 – September 6, 1843
10. Correspondence – Topp, Robertson – Yeatman, Woods & Company
11. Legal Documents – Court Judgments, undated and 1833-1842 – Notices of Public Protest, 1839-1848
12. Legal Documents – Promissory Notes, undated and 1827-1833
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16. Receipts – General, 1843-1847 and 1856

**Box 5 – Mississippi Central Railroad Company Papers**

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